

American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church

Todd M. Kerstetter
Texas Christian University

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American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church, by Alex Beam. New York: Public Affairs, 2014. xv, 334 pp. Illustrations, map, cast of characters, chronology, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$26.99 hardcover.

Reviewer Todd M. Kerstetter is associate professor of history at Texas Christian University. He is the author of *God's Country, Uncle Sam's Land: Faith and Conflict in the American West* (2005).

In *American Crucifixion* Alex Beam provocatively depicts the 1844 murder of Joseph Smith in western Illinois as a crucifixion. Beam, a gifted writer with an eye for great stories, makes his case through an intimate discussion of Mormon history and the social and political development of frontier Illinois. He mined appropriate archives at Yale University and in Utah, Illinois, and elsewhere; read widely in up-to-date secondary literature; and consulted an array of experts on Mormon history in preparing this solidly researched work. Almost all of the action unfolds in Illinois from the arrival of Mormon settlers in 1838 through Smith's death in 1844. Missouri, from which the Mormons were expelled, has a minor but critical role. Iowa makes a cameo appearance.

This journal's readers will find much to appreciate in Beam's book. Mormons and Mormonism migrated from upstate New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois and then through Iowa and Nebraska to Utah, among other places. During the Illinois period, the Mormons established a theocratic city-state at Nauvoo, on the bank of the Mississippi River across from Iowa, built their second temple, and made quantum leaps in developing ritual and doctrine, perhaps most notably significant developments in plural marriage. Most important, Smith's murder deprived the Mormon community of its founding prophet, leader, and first candidate for president of the United States. In the aftermath, Brigham Young emerged as Smith's successor and took the main body of Mormons out of Illinois, across Iowa, and on to Utah in a migration that has been likened to the biblical Exodus. At another level, the book's discussion of Nauvoo and surrounding non-Mormon communities provides great insight into the development of social order and justice on what was at the time the frontier of U.S. expansion.

Beam thoroughly explores events of 1838 through 1844, years that saw the Mormons flee Missouri and develop Nauvoo. He wisely begins the book with helpful tools for newcomers to the topic: a cast of characters, a list of place names, and a map. Eleven of the book's 14 chapters deal with the five-year period leading up to Smith's murder. Events turn quickly as the Mormons transform from a welcomed force for settlement and development to a detested community. As Nauvoo boomed from a sleepy river village to a city of 10,000 that threatened to

rival Chicago, non-Mormons in the area began to resent their new neighbors' influence and unusual habits. By chapter four, "Everybody Hates the Mormons," the seeds of conflict have sprouted. Chapter six, "The Perversion of Sacred Things," reveals the deep discord that affected life in and around Nauvoo. Conflict over plural marriage pitted Mormons against Mormons as well as non-Mormons. Smith's destruction of an opposition newspaper put him at odds with the nation's fundamental belief in the freedom of the press and might have done as much as anything to precipitate his demise. As tensions rose, Smith declared martial law in Nauvoo, which ultimately yielded a charge of treason that landed him in jail in Carthage, the county seat. A vigilante mob stormed the prison and killed Smith and his brother Hyrum, a potential successor. In Beam's telling, Smith foresaw his demise and viewed his opponents as wishing to crucify him. He casts Thomas Ford, governor of Illinois, as Pontius Pilate, the secular figure unwilling to stop a vigilante "crucifixion," carried out in this case by firearms. Two chapters discuss how the Mormons responded to the murders and their aftermath. Beam helps his readers by providing a summary of Mormon history and theology early in the book.

Beam, a journalist and writer who has published two novels and several works of nonfiction, tells the story in lively, engaging prose that should appeal to both general and academic audiences. He presents an admirably balanced treatment of conflicts in which each side has been vilified. Mormon scholars likely will not find much new here. Readers interested in antebellum midwestern history might, especially if they have not paid much attention to Mormon history. Labeling Joseph Smith's death a "crucifixion" bends the word's meaning and stands to generate controversy by likening Smith to Jesus Christ. Whatever shortcomings might attach to Beam's usage, it fits on enough levels to inspire thoughtful reconsideration of how religion, society, and government intersected on the Illinois frontier in the 1840s.

From Vicksburg to Cedar Creek: The 22nd Iowa Infantry in the Civil War, by Thomas P. McKenna. Iowa City: Camp Pope Publishing, 2014. 220 pp. Illustrations, maps, glossary, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$28.95 hardcover, \$18.95 paperback.

Reviewer Kenneth L. Lyftogt is a lecturer in history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of several books on Iowa and the Civil War, including *Iowa's Forgotten General: Matthew Mark Trumbull and the Civil War* (2005).

Few Civil War regiments have a story to compare with that of the 22nd Iowa Infantry, which served in both the Western and Eastern theaters of the war, with a battle record as gallant and as tragic as any. The 22nd